

E. Probable Future Environment Without the Proposal

1. Trends in Development and Use Within Federal Lands

Existing federal activity areas and accompanying development would be maintained with minor modifications to improve the recreational experience of future visitors. Some 70 to 80 percent of the national seashore visitors would continue to be concentrated in the existing developments at the Sunken Forest (Sailor's Haven) area and the Watch Hill activity area. The Watch Hill area possibly could accommodate 3,500 visitors per day if adequate ferry transport was made available; however, future optimum use levels have been set at approximately 2,000 in the new general management plan. The Sunken Forest activity area presently receives about 1,800 visitors per day, or about 90 percent of the optimum-use level. If future use was allowed to increase beyond existing levels, facilities would be difficult to maintain at standards, disturbances of outstanding natural resources could occur, and the visitor experience would suffer.

As Suffolk County continues to gain population and as visitor demand on existing facilities increases, park resources and facilities would be negatively impacted without the management proposals included in the general management plan.

The high dune management unit could experience a progressive increase in visitation without any facilities to provide for visitor demands, and visitors would not be informed of the outstanding natural features of the unit and the need to conserve and protect them. Also, future visitors would not be properly controlled; vehicles would not be managed as effectively to protect the park resources and visitors' experience; the high dune management unit possibly would continue to be an area containing trash, old buildings, and derelict materials; and the unit would not receive the benefits of being managed as a primitive or wilderness area.

Facilities and natural resources within the federal area known as Talisman would continue to deteriorate. No effort would be made to provide for the present level of use at Talisman. Existing structures would deteriorate to a state of nonuse and would be visually unpleasant and probably dangerous for future visitors. Accommodation of visitor needs that could be undertaken at Talisman without significant impacts on the immediate environment would be precluded.

The park's ability to provide for unusual or diverse recreational and interpretive opportunities would

become progressively more limited. Such uses as primitive camping and organized camping and many quality environmental education programs would be largely restricted or unavailable.

Without implementation of current management and planning proposals, coordination and development of the many recreational opportunities of this region would become more difficult. Facility duplication, adverse environmental impacts, and land-use incompatibilities would probably result.

It was the intent of Congress that as much land and water within the authorized seashore boundary as possible be acquired eventually by the federal government (P.L. 88-587, section 2a). Land donations, exchanges, and transfers by private and public owners have become less likely since 1964, partly because of increasing local recreational pressures. Without the opportunity on the part of the National Park Service to acquire certain lands such land-use abuses as building on the dunes, excessive densities, and overloading of sewage treatment systems might occur. The park would be unable to provide adequate protection of the dune/beach system within the communities, cultural resources such as the Fire Island Lighthouse may not receive protection, and the park would be unable to acquire certain inholdings located within large federal tracts.

If sound zoning and land-use controls are not enforced within the 17 communities, future development may change the character and recreational patterns of the communities. The dune area in the communities would receive little additional protection, with communities becoming more subject to minor and major storm damage.

Recreational uses presently not found within the communities could result in population density problems and secondary impacts upon federal lands of the seashore. General environmental quality of the national seashore as envisioned in the 1964 Fire Island Act would progressively deteriorate islandwide.

Without a general management plan, there would be no overall framework governing the role of the National Park Service in the future development and use of lands within and adjacent to the boundary of the national seashore. Non-federal landowners would assume a stronger role in land-use and development decisions. The National Park Service could lose opportunities for improving and protecting federal lands and affecting environmental quality in non-federal seashore lands.

2. Trends in the Natural Environment

Existing federal lands would remain essentially as they are. Removal of unwanted existing docks and homesites might occur. Natural plant succession and revegetation would create a progressively more stable environment until a destructive storm reinitiated the successional process.

The growing realization of the importance of healthy dunes in stabilizing the barrier island would result in increased attempts to stabilize dunes by economically feasible means in order to reduce damage to both improved properties and the natural environment from erosive ocean tides and currents. However, development of a uniform, islandwide management strategy for the seashore's beaches and dunes would be difficult without the direction of the National Park Service. Locally severe erosion on both the bayside and oceanside of the island would continue; and moderate-intensity storms would continue to threaten destruction of natural resources and developments.

Protection of certain important natural environments would be uncertain. The artificial islands north of Moriches Inlet, which contain some of Long Island's most valuable water-bird nesting habitat, would not be given adequate recognition. Vandalism of nests on these flat, sandy islands could increase, and populations of affected species (some potentially endangered) could decline. The unditched Babylon-owned Oak Beach marsh west of the park would probably not be utilized for research. Under the most ecologically adverse situation, this last unditched tidal marsh in the region could be ditched for mosquito control, and its present ecological value could thereby be minimized.

Increasing use of vehicles on the beach and behind the dunes might eventually entail serious hazards to public safety. The noise and pollution these vehicles generate are adverse influences on the natural environment. Rutting of the beach is aesthetically objectionable. According to Visco's 1977 report, "Use of off-road vehicles is causing the island to erode at a faster rate and is contributing to the environmental degradation of Fire Island." The numbers of vehicles allowed on the beach during the season of permitted use would eventually have to be restricted by both the National Park Service and Suffolk County to reduce the magnitude of the above impacts to acceptable levels. As existing sewage-treatment systems at federal developments received increased loads due to additional visitation, system efficiencies would decrease and the risk of polluting the bay and near-surface groundwater lenses would become greater.

3. Trends in the Social Environment

Suffolk County's population increase would continue to be accompanied by an ever-increasing need to expand existing recreational facilities, to develop recreational facilities in new areas, and to diversify available recreational opportunities. Lands directly across the bays from Fire Island would probably be fully developed before 1990. Opportunities at proposed federal activity areas such as the lighthouse and Talisman areas would not be available to this population. Increased pressure on accessible areas such as the high dune management unit would result in a lowering of environmental quality in these outstanding natural areas without proposed management actions.

Traffic congestion and crowding in and near ferry terminal areas in Sayville and Patchogue would become progressively more severe unless the capacities of parking lots and access routes were increased and a more efficient mass-transportation system was developed. Arriving visitors would not be oriented to the national seashore at the mainland staging areas because they would not be under federal jurisdiction.

Fire Island's communities would become increasingly more crowded as additional development occurred. Without the zoning proposals, variances would continue with the possibility for much higher densities and many additional commercial and multi-family uses being located within the communities.

The character of the communities would change toward a more typical commercial seashore area. The leisure experience of those living in or visiting the communities would continue to change. The visual appearance of the communities would be less appealing because of loosely enforced zoning regulations, more diverse architectural forms, and less importance being placed on maintenance of the natural qualities of the communities.

Beaching and offshore mooring of private boats in undeveloped portions of Fire Island would increase as congestion near major developments increased. Use of these undeveloped lands would become more random, less well supervised, and potentially more damaging to the natural environment.

4. Trends in the Cultural Environment

Ongoing maintenance and rehabilitation of the William Floyd Estate would continue, and the condition of existing structures would improve. The Fire Island Lighthouse--particularly its external surface--would continue to deteriorate unless it was restored by another agency or organization.

Interpretation and visitor services relating to the cultural environment of Fire Island would not be available to many future visitors. The cultural environment probably would receive little additional recognition in the management and operation of the national seashore.